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ABSTRACT

This study investigated ethnic differences and the effects of racism on the college adjustment of African-American, Asian, and Latino students who attended five undergraduate predominantly Anglo-American colleges. Results indicated that social adjustment was better for Anglos than it was for Asians and Latinos. African-Americans reported the most experiences of racism and Asians reported the least. Asians and Latinos who experienced racism adjusted less well academically and socially than Asian and Latino students not subject to racism. The social adjustment of African-American students who experienced racism was less than those who did not experience racism. Academic adjustment for African-Americans was not differentially affected by racism. That the college adjustment of African-Americans was less affected by racism than it was for Asians and Latinos was explained in terms of possible differences in expectation, coping strategies, and intra-group support. Racism may have been more normative for African-Americans who were less surprised when it occurred. It was also reasoned that African-Americans may have had a greater sense of community and that this could have been an effective buffer against racism. (Author)

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ETHNIC DIFFERENCES AND THE EFFECTS OF RACISM ON COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated ethnic differences and the effects of racism on the college adjustment of African-American, Asian, and Latino students who attended five undergraduate predominantly Anglo-American colleges. Results indicated that social adjustment was better for Anglos than it was for Asians and Latinos. African-Americans reported the most experiences of racism and Asians reported the least. Asians and Latinos who experienced racism adjusted less well academically and socially than Asian and Latino students who did not experience racism. The social adjustment of African-American students who experienced racism was less than that of those who did not experience racism. Academic adjustment for African-Americans was not differentially affected by racism. That the college adjustment of African-Americans was less affected by racism than it was for Asians and Latinos was explained in terms of possible differences in expectation, coping strategies, and intra-group support. Racism may have been more normative for African-Americans who were less surprised when it occurred. It was also reasoned that African-Americans may have had a greater sense of community and that this could have been an effective buffer against racism.

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical model of Tinto (1975) indicates that colleges and universities consist of two subsystems: academic and social. For African-American students, research has shown that they experience difficulty adjusting to these two dimensions when they attend predominantly Anglo-American colleges and universities (e.g. Fleming, 1984).

More specifically, they have been found to have problems with academics (Harris & Nettles, 1991; Smith, 1981; Jones, Harris, & Hauck, 1975; Suen, 1983) and adjusting to faculty (Allen, Bobo, & Fleuranges, 1984; Babbit, Burbach, & Thompson, 1975; Boyd, 1973; Butler, 1977; Dinka, Mazzella, & Pilant, 1980; Jones, Harris, & Hauck, 1973; Semmes, 1985; Smith, 1980; Thompson & Michel, 1972; Westbrook, Miyares, & Roberts, 1977). Moreover, they have been shown to have an inadequate social life, (Jones et. al., 1975), feel lonely, nonentitled, isolated, culturally and socially alienated (Smith, 1981; Bourassa, 1991; Suen, 1983; Pfeiffer & Schneider, 1974). They have also been found to experience difficulty achieving congruence (Thompson & Fretz, 1991), and to have a higher drop out rate due to social alienation (Astin, 1982; Suen, 1983; Loo & Rollison, 1986).

Similarly, it has been found that most students of color on predominantly Anglo college campuses tend to feel more culturally and ethnically alienated than Anglo students (Loo and Rollison, 1986; Suen, 1983; and Astin, 1982). Hsia (1987-88) has also reported that Asian students experience alienation on predominantly Anglo college campuses.

An interesting question to ask is why is it that students of color experience such difficulty adjusting to predominantly Anglo colleges and universities. This study predicted that racism may be one of the causal factors since racism has been found to be prevalent at Anglo

colleges and universities (Hurtado, 1992; Goleman, 1990; Boyer, 1990; Nagamoto, Parham, O'Connell & Bakota, 1987).

However, no one has actually investigated effects of racism on the college adjustment of students of color. College adjustment for minority students may be adversely affected by racism because it retards the individual's development during the time when learning is so crucial. According to Weatherby (1981), the process of learning during the college years is accompanied by anxiety and a change in self-esteem. He further theorized that such a change can stimulate a developmental crisis that may or may not result in personality strengths, depending upon the presence of support. The absence of support in combination with inner stress could have negative effects for students as they are confronted with normal life changes.

Erikson (1968) also theorized that issues related to intimacy and career are crucial aspects of identity development for the traditionally aged college student. He postulated that it is the confluence of the individual and the society that constitutes the social actualness, mental and emotional alertness of the person.

Given the prevalence of racism on predominantly Anglo college campuses, it is reasonable to hypothesize that racism can be debilitating for college students of color. Thus, one purpose of the present study was to examine effects of racism on the college adjustment of African-American, Asian, and Latino students who attended predominantly Anglo colleges. Another purpose of the study was to determine if there were ethnic differences in the experience of racism and in college adjustment. Whether students experienced racism or not, the present study also assessed if they perceived racism to be a problem on their college campus.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for the study consisted of 540 students from the five undergraduate Claremont Colleges who responded to a random sample of 1330. The sample was generated by the Registrar's Office at each college and was balanced for gender, class standing, college, and ethnicity except that all 140 of the African-American students received the questionnaire since there was such a small number of these students at the five colleges. The ethnic composition of the respondents was 40 African-Americans, 159 Asians, 210 Anglos, 103 Latinos, and 28 other.

Instruments

Questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the author to solicit information on demographics, academic and social adjustment, grade point average, racism experienced on campus, and perceived racism on campus.

Racism. This independent variable was measured by first asking subjects to rate on a five point Likert Scale "Strongly disagree", "Agree", to "Strongly agree" to the statement, "I have experienced racism at The Claremont Colleges." Responses were scored from one to five respectively. Based on statistical analyses, subjects were categorized as either having experienced racism or not having experienced racism on their college campus.

Secondly, if subjects had experienced racism, they were asked to indicate the type or form of racism as: ethnic jokes, harassment by virtue of your race, promotion of racist stereotypes, condescension, overt hostility, verbal racist comments, written racist comments, racist graffiti, exclusion, differential treatment in class,

differential treatment outside of class, and/or other.

Perceived Racism. This independent variable was measured by asking subjects to rate on a five point Likert Scale their perception of racism as "Not a problem at all", "A problem", to "A very significant problem" to the statement, "Whether or not you have experienced racism yourself, please indicate the degree to which you feel racism is a problem at The Claremont Colleges." Responses were scored from one to five respectively. Based on statistical analyses, subjects were categorized as either having perceived racism to be a problem or not having perceived racism to be a problem on their college campus.

Academic Adjustment. This dependent variable was measured by a survey of five questions adapted from the work of Fleming (1984). Subjects were asked to rate on a five point Likert Scale their academic experiences as "Very dissatisfied", "Satisfied", to "Very satisfied", example: "How do you feel about your academic life at your college?" The responses were scored from one to five respectively. A high score reflected good academic adjustment.

Grade Point Average. Grade point average was another measure of college adjustment. Subjects were asked to indicate their GPA. Subjects were categorized as having either an A, B, or C grade point average.

Social Adjustment. This dependent variable was measured by a survey of ten questions adapted from the work of Fleming (1984) and Clovis (1988). Subjects were asked to rate on a five point Likert Scale their social experiences at college as "Very dissatisfied", "Satisfied", to "Very satisfied", example: "In general, how do you feel about the people you have met in college?" Responses were scored from one to five respectively. A high score reflected good social adjustment.

Procedure. Subjects received the questionnaire by campus mail with a returned envelope and a letter informing them of their rights and the general purpose of the study. Scoring of the results

was done by research assistants who did not know the purpose of the study.

SCORING

Racism. The question measuring the experience of racism was only given to African-American, Asian and Latino Students. As a result of statistical analyses, two distinct groups emerged: those who had experienced racism versus those who had not experienced racism. This was done by determining whether the responses to the questions, "I have experienced racism at the Claremont Colleges", on the five point Likert Scale differentially predicted the responses to the questions on academic adjustment. A one-way analysis of variance was significant ($p < .0008$). The inference being that those students experiencing racism tended to be less adjusted with their college life in respect to academics. A Scheffe test between condensed groups (1 and 2 versus 3, 4, and 5) proved significant, $p < .001$.

Perceived Racism. Similarly, a one-way analysis of variance comparing academic college adjustment with degree of perceived racism (measured on a 5 point scale) proved significant ($p < .0375$). A Scheffe test between condensed groups proved significant, $p < .002$: groups 1 and 2 for those who had not perceived racism versus groups 3, 4 and 5 for those who had perceived racism.

College Adjustment. The academic and social adjustment scores were computed by standardizing the scores for the questions that loaded on each factor and summing them. The standard scale gives an idea of how each respondent scored in relation to the mean normative response. A positive score represents a high score relative to the average score on the dimensions of either academic or social adjustment. Those students with a positive score were interpreted as being more adjusted than the average of the sample and vice versa for a negative score.

RESULTS

Racism. After taking out Anglos, a chi square analysis of African-Americans, Asians, and Latinos against the experience of racism at college was significant, $X^2 = 11.2$, df = 2, $p<.003$. African-Americans (70%) experienced racism to a greater degree than Asians (40.9%) and Latinos (51%). African-Americans experienced racism to a higher degree than did Latinos. See Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Chi square analyses yielded significant differences between ethnic groups in the experience of five different types of racism. Racial stereotypes emerged as significant, $p < .03$, and showed that African-Americans experienced more incidents proportionally than did Asians or Latinos. There was also a significant difference in the experience of condescension and written racist comments with African-Americans experiencing more incidents proportionately than Asians, $p < .03$. Similarly, with racist graffiti, proportionately more African Americans and Latinos experienced this type of racism than Asians, $p < .004$. The same pattern is true for differential treatment in class, $p < .003$.

Perceived Racism. A chi square analysis of African-Americans, Anglos, Asians, and Latinos against the perceived degree of racism as a problem on campus was significant, $X^2 = 16.5$, df = 2, $p < .003$. African-Americans (84.2%) and Latinos (60%) perceived racism as a problem on campus more than Asians (48.4%) and Anglos (47.8%). See Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Academic Adjustment. A one-way analysis of variance showed significant differences in academic adjustment when broken down by racism, $F = 4.88$, df = 320, $p < .008$. Subjects who experienced racism were less adjusted academically than were subjects who did not experience racism (Mean = -.88 vs. Mean = 1.52).

Ethnicity, alone, proved to be insignificant as a predictor of academic adjustment, $p < .19$. All groups, except Asians averaged on the high side of academic adjustment.

However, a two-way analysis of variance broken down by ethnicity and racism was significant, $F = 4.73$, df = 289, $p < .001$. A t- test found that the academic adjustment for Latinos was less when they experienced racism (Mean=-0.72) than when they did not experience racism (Mean= 1.43), $t=3.13$, df = 95, $p < .022$. See Figure 3. A t- test found that the academic adjustment for Asians was less when they experienced racism (Mean = -1.6) than when they did not experience racism (Mean = -.19), $t = 3.06$, df = 151, $p < .003$. See Figure 4.

Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here

There were no significant differences in the academic adjustment scores for African-American subjects who had experienced racism and those who had not experienced racism.

A one-way analysis of variance comparing academic adjustment with degree of perceived racism was significant, $F = 4.20$, $p > .03$. Subjects who perceived racism as a problem on campus (Mean = -.47) were less adjusted academically than were subjects who did not perceive racism to be a problem (Mean = .51).

Grade Point Average. A one-way analysis of variance testing for academic adjustment by grade point average was significant, $F= 14.14$, df = 525, $p < .00$, and showed that students who had

higher grades (Mean= 1.57 for A, Mean= - .27 for B) were more adjusted academically than students who had lower grades (Mean= -1.15 for C). Scheffe tests showed differences to be significant between A and B subjects and between A and C subjects, $p < .05$.

Social Adjustment. A one-way analysis of variance showed that difference in social adjustment by ethnicity was significant, $F= 4.30$, $df = 483$, $p <.005$. A Scheffe test showed that Anglos were better adjusted socially than were Latinos and Asians (Mean= .82 vs Mean = -.76 vs Mean = -.46, $p <.05$)

A t-test was done to examine differences in social adjustment when broken down by racism. The results were significant, $t = 3.73$, $df = 275$, $p < .00$, and showed that non-Anglo subjects who reported experiencing racism (Mean = .34) were less adjusted socially than their counterparts who did not experience racism (Mean =-1.44), $p <.05$.

A t-test found that African-Americans who had experienced racism had a lower social adjustment score (Mean= -.15) than African-Americans who had not experienced racism (Mean = .33), $t = 2.6$, $df = 35$, $p <.04$. See Figure 5.

A t-test found that Asian subjects who had experienced racism (Mean = -1.68) had a lower social adjustment score than Asian subjects who had not experienced racism (Mean = .50), $t= 3.27$, $df =149$, $p <.001$. See Figure 6.

A t-test found that Latino subjects who had experienced racism had a lower social adjustment score (Mean =-1.8) than Latino subjects who had not experienced racism (Mean = 0.43), $t = 2.61$, $df = 86$, $p <.011$. See Figure 7.

Insert Figures 5, 6, and 7 about here

Differences in social adjustment by perceived racism and by grade point average were insignificant.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous research by Nagamoto et. at. (1987), African-American college students reported more experiences of racism than did Asian and Latino students. More racism may have been targeted at the African-American students on these predominantly Anglo colleges because the prejudices and racism accompanying their history of oppression continued to generate more racism than did the histories of Asians and Latinos.

Additionally, in contrast to Asians and Latinos, African-Americans are more dissimilar in physical appearance: for example, their darker skin color which may have resulted in more racism. This theory is supported by research which indicates that people tend to like individuals who are more similar to them when very little information is known about the person (Byrne, 1971). It is possible that dissimilarity may also have resulted in negative stereotyping for students of color and probably more so for African-Americans than for Asians and Latinos. This form of stereotyping merely reinforced racism because according to Fiske (1993), it is a means of control through the use of prejudice and discrimination.

That more African-American students perceived racism to be a problem whether they experienced it or not is not surprising since these students experienced more racism than Asian and Latino students.

In addition to differences in the experience of racism, this study also showed that there were ethnic differences in college adjustment and these differences tended to occur more for social than for academic adjustment. The social adjustment of Anglo students was better than it was for Asian and Latino students. Although higher, the social adjustment of Anglo students was not that different from the social adjustment of African-American

students.

Furthermore, ethnicity alone did not fully explain the differences in college adjustment for students of color. This study demonstrated that college adjustment was also affected by racism and its effect differed depending upon one's ethnic group. More specifically, the social adjustment for African-Americans was less affected by racism than was the social adjustment of Latinos and Asians. Similarly, the academic adjustment for Asian and Latino students was not as good when they had experienced racism as it was when they had not experienced racism. However, the academic adjustment of African-Americans was not differentially affected by racism.

Thus, racism did appear to be debilitating and seemed to have retarded the college adjustment of most students of color. However, despite having experienced the most racism and in comparison to Asian and Latino students, the college adjustment of African-Americans was less affected by racism. This suggests that African-American students were more able to buffer against racism. Given their history of oppression in this country, racism may have been more normative for African-Americans who were less surprised when confronted by it. Moreover, they may have had lower expectations of the campus climate which may have enabled them to accommodate themselves to the racist environment. These coping mechanisms were a direct result of the cumulative experiences and were probably helpful in assisting them through any crisis caused by racism.

Whereas, the experience of racism in this country by Asians and Latinos is different. Neither group has been so exposed to the history of suffering as has African-Americans. Thus, when faced with racism in college, Asians and Latinos may have suffered more because racism was less expected and they may have been less prepared to cope with it.

Moreover, the African-American students may have had a

greater sense of community than the Asian and Latino students who may have been more diverse and thereby less cohesive as a group. This division among the groups was a less effective buffer against racism. Conversely, the greater cohesiveness for the African-Americans may have provided the support needed to ward off the negativism of racism.

In summary, this study showed that students of color experienced racism at the predominantly Anglo-American colleges studied. How racism affected their college adjustment differed for the ethnic groups with African-American students seeming to be less affected by racism than Asian and Latino students. It was reasoned that this may have occurred because of the differences in coping styles of the ethnic groups. An interesting task for future research would be to investigate specific coping strategies that students of color use when faced with racism.

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ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCE OF RACISM

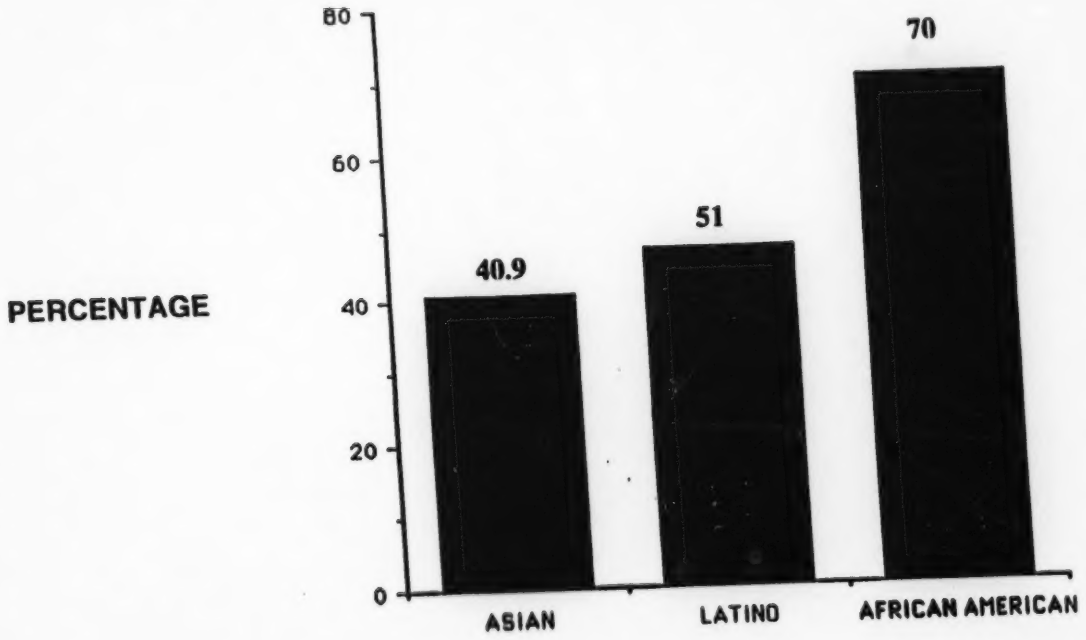

FIGURE 1

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED RACISM

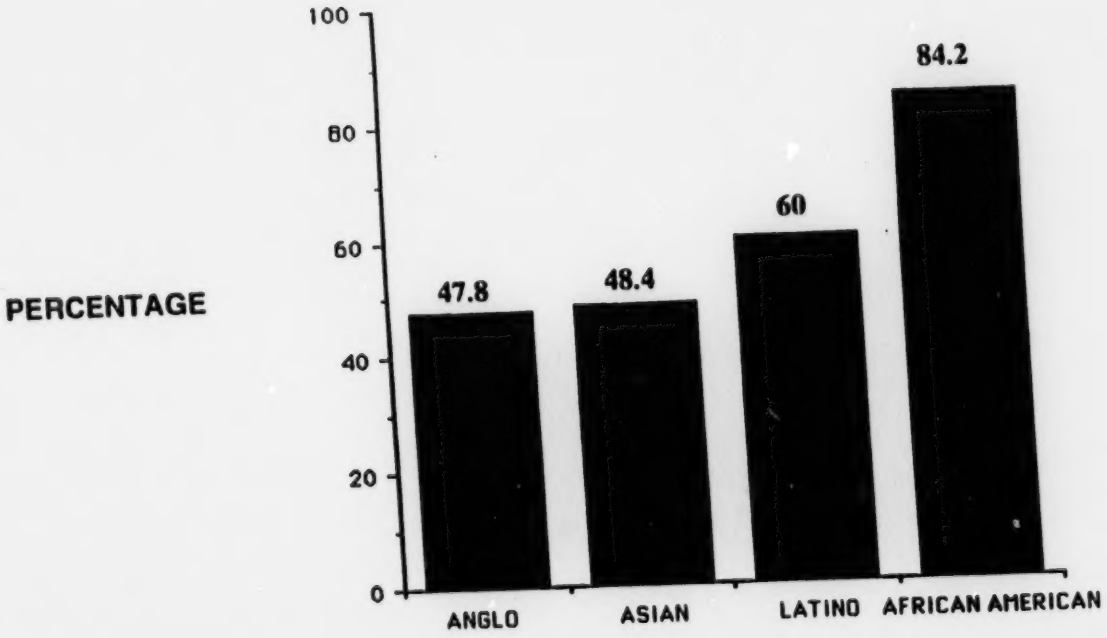

FIGURE 2

DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT FOR ASIAN STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED RACISM AND THOSE WHO DID NOT

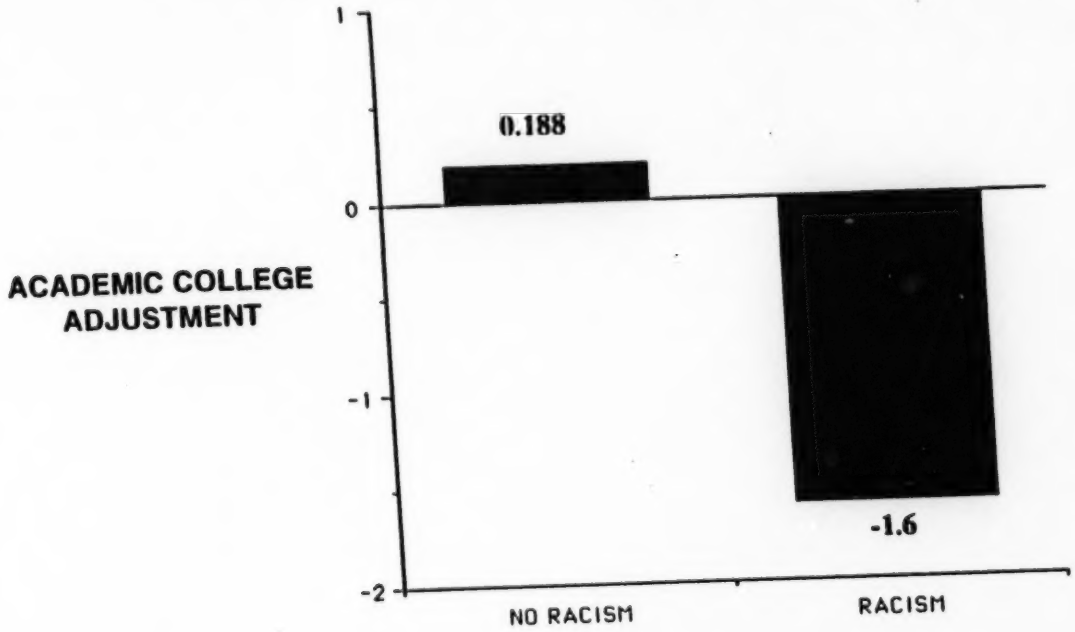

FIGURE 3

DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT FOR LATINO STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED RACISM AND THOSE WHO DID NOT

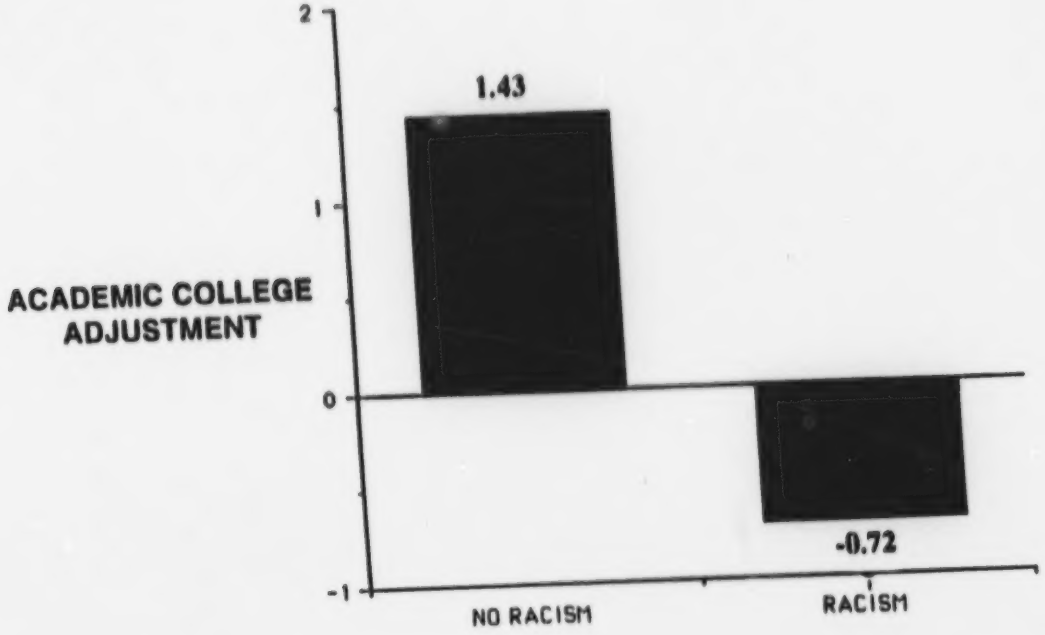

FIGURE 4

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED RACISM AND THOSE WHO DID NOT

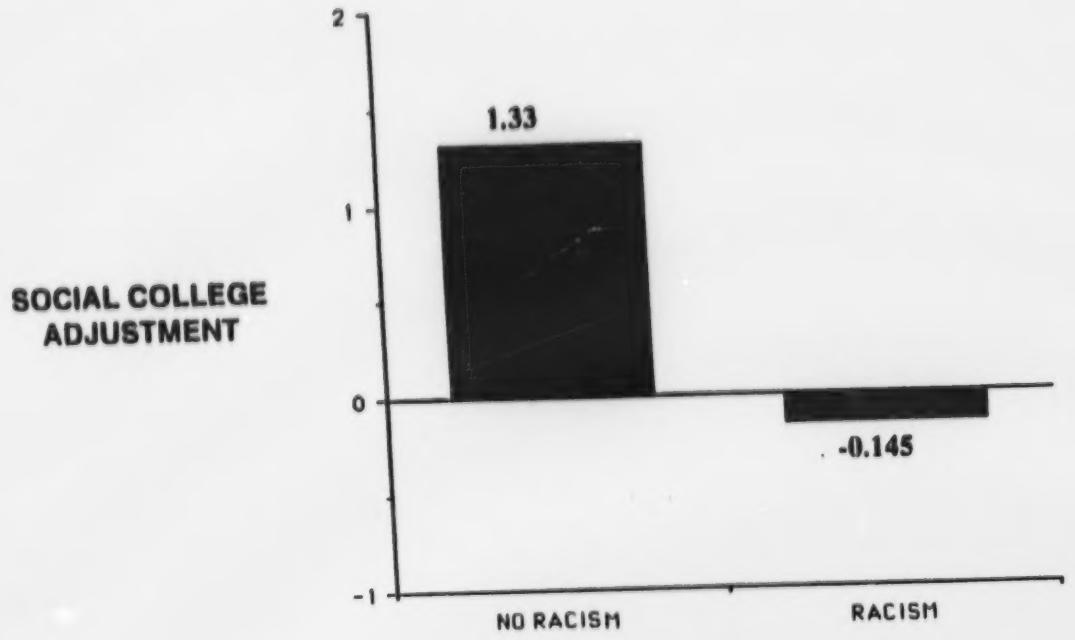

FIGURE 5

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT FOR ASIAN STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED RACISM AND THOSE WHO DID NOT

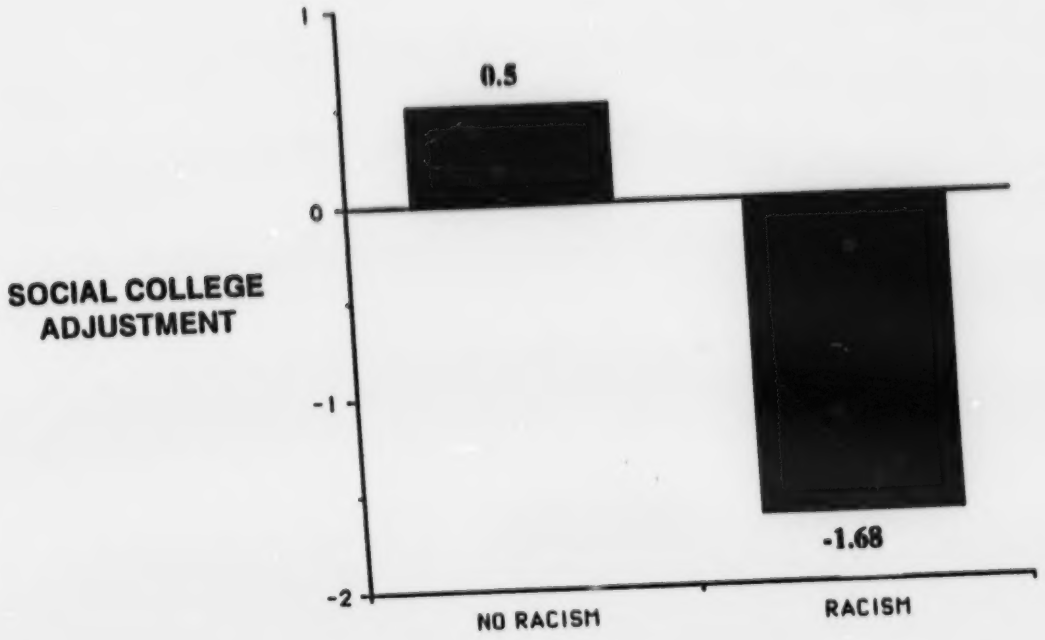

FIGURE 6

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT FOR LATINO STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED RACISM AND THOSE WHO DID NOT

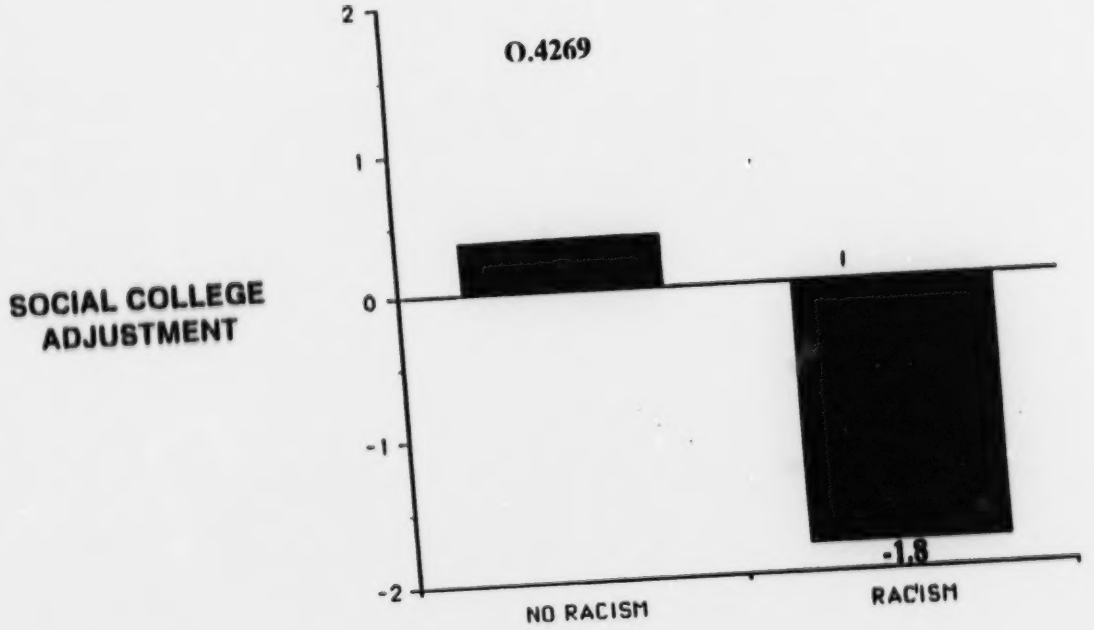

FIGURE 7